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GENERAL MATTHEW B. RIDGWAY: ATTRIBUTES OF BATTLE COMMAND
AND DECISION-MAKING

by

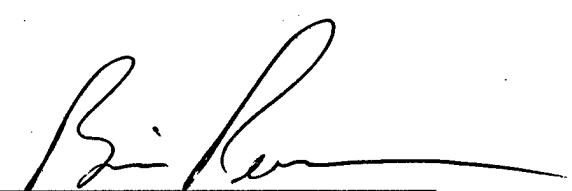
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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of

General Matthew B. Ridgway: Attributes of Battle Command and Decision-Making

What affect will information superiority have on the decision-making process of the future? Will information dominance require the attributes of future battle commanders be different than those of the past?

This paper focuses on the intellectual and personality traits of General Matthew B. Ridgway as they apply to operational command and decision-making. These traits are considered essential for analysis and serve as a framework in which to examine their applicability to future command. The essential qualities of an operational commander are divided into two categories: intellect and personality. Each category is further divided into elemental traits. The application of these traits to Ridgway as they pertain to his command in the Korean war serve to demonstrate their permanence.

Future battle commanders will be well served to emulate those qualities of Matthew B. Ridgway. His exemplary battle command proved essential in achieving the objectives of the Korean War.

Introduction

Joint Vision 2010 suggests future operational commanders will work under the umbrella of information superiority. A logical consequence of this superiority is a reduction in uncertainty as it applies to the many facets of operational command. By reducing uncertainty, the decision-making process should become simplified and more efficient. Additionally, reduced uncertainty may increase the emphasis on making the "correct" decision as more information will be readily available to the commander. As the information dominance of Joint Vision 2010 approaches, will the decision-making skills of operational commanders deteriorate? Will the ability to make decisions in an environment of uncertainty become obsolete? Regardless of the effect on the decision-making process and the quality of decisions, decisions must be made. As James Schmitt points out, "All military operations are based on decisions... Victory is a reflection of sound decisions skillfully executed."¹ With the advent of information superiority, a fundamental question arises: will the attributes of future operational commanders be different from those of the past? This question may be answered by examining the characteristic decision-making traits of a historic operational commander and demonstrating their applicability to future battle commanders.²

Few leaders exemplify battle command better than General Matthew B. Ridgway. As an exceptional World War II and Korean war commander, he epitomized the intellectual and personality attributes required of future battle commanders. His instinctive use of these

¹ John F. Schmitt, "Observations on Decisionmaking In Battle," Marine Corps Gazette March 1988, 18.

² This paper will refer to the battle commander as an operational commander. A battle command entails more than just leadership and is defined as "The art of battle decision making, leading, and motivating soldiers and their organizations into action to accomplish missions. Includes visualizing current state and future state, the formulating concepts of operations to get from one to the other at least cost. Also includes assigning missions; prioritizing and allocating and knowing how and when to make adjustments during the fight." Headquarters Department of the Army, FM 100-5 Operations (Washington, D.C.: June 14 1993), Glossary-1.

attributes proved vital to his successful military career and serve to illustrate the model battle commander. The characteristics of the commander listed in this paper, though not all-inclusive, are the essential qualities and provide a baseline of analysis. These characteristics are a blend of Clausewitz's military genius concept with the qualities of the expert decision-maker and are divided into two categories: intellect and personality.³

To gain appreciation and understanding of these attributes as they apply to Ridgway, it is beneficial to review his progression toward command as Supreme Commander Allied Powers, Far East and Commander in Chief of the United Nations Command.

³ Thomas H. Killion, "Insights: Clausewitz and Military Genius," Military Review, July-August 1995, 97.

Ridgway - Command Background

Ridgway's higher command experience began in 1942 when he was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division as the assistant division commander and later the commander. He led the division with distinction in Sicily and Normandy.⁴ In 1944, commanded the XVIII Airborne Corps in the Ardennes campaign. Of his leadership during World War II, historian Max Hastings wrote, "He possesses almost all the military virtues - courage, brains, ruthlessness, decision."⁵

After World War II, he served in the Department of the Army staff as Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Administration. In this capacity, Ridgway became extremely knowledgeable of the operations in Korea. As a result of his experience in World War II, his exceptional leadership qualities and his knowledge of Korea, Ridgway was selected to replace General Walker as Commander of the Eighth Army in Korea.⁶ As the Eighth Army Commander, Ridgway commanded 423,000 multi-national ground troops, the majority from the Republic of Korea (ROK).⁷

On arrival in Korea, he was determined to begin an offensive believing the North Koreans and Chinese had reached their culmination point. His conviction to begin an offensive was first articulated when he met with General MacArthur. At the end of the meeting, Ridgway asked, "If I find the situation to my liking, would you have any objections

⁴ Max Hastings, The Korean War (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 189.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Billy C. Mossman, Ebb and Flow November 1950-July 1951 (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1990), 177.

⁷ Mossman, 23.

to my attacking?" MacArthur responded, "The Eighth Army is yours, Matt. Do what you think best."⁸ Unfortunately, he soon discovered how discouraged his Army was. Having endured changes from defensive to offensive and back again, the Eighth Army had suffered a severe decline in morale. Equally pervasive, and dangerous, was the defensive mindset emanating from MacArthur's staff, Eighth Army staff, field commanders and troops.

With little guidance, Ridgway filled the "mission vacuum" MacArthur felt existed. Having just come from Washington, he knew what the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) expected of him and was receptive their desires. He saw his tasks as restoring confidence and self-esteem to the Eighth Army, preventing another Dunkirk, and punishing the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) to the point that Peking would be forced to the negotiating table.⁹ To do this, Ridgway first established a suitable defense in depth. Then, he moved to a limited offensive-defensive posture. Finally, he conducted an all-out offensive.¹⁰ According to Army Chief of Staff Collins, Ridgway "...was faced with a situation which suited his personality, his drive, his initiative, and everything perfectly well, and he did a magnificent job. He turned that army around; there just isn't any question about it."¹¹ As the Eighth Army commander, Ridgway displayed knowledge, courage, insight, intuition and a grasp of all aspects (force, time and space) essential to achieve the desired objectives. He revitalized a war-wearied, disheartened, and dejected army and turned it into a competent and effective fighting force. His initial development of a defense in depth eliminated the likelihood of evacuating the Korean

⁸ Matthew B. Ridgway, The Korean War (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 83.

⁹ Clay Blair, The Forgotten War (New York: Times Books, 1987), 569.

¹⁰ Ibid., 571

¹¹ D. Clayton James and Anne Sharp Wells, Refighting the Last War: Command and Crisis in Korea 1950-1953 (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 58.

peninsula and his follow-on methodic and relentless offensive assured a position of strength at the negotiating table. His ability to envision and achieve military objectives in consonance with the limited war strategy of the U.S. and U.N. would prove indispensable in his selection as MacArthur's replacement. After three and a half months as commander of the Eighth Army, Ridgway replaced MacArthur as Supreme Commander Allied Powers, Far East and Commander in Chief of the United Nations Command.

Ridgway's extraordinary command accomplishments during World War II and the Korean War underscore his suitability as a model battle commander. In addition, his distinguished command background provides the framework to better illustrate the fundamental attributes of the battle commander as they pertain to intellect and personality. Applying these attributes to Ridgway's successes will reveal their importance and relevance to future battle commanders.

Attributes of the Battle Commander

1. Intellect. The basic intellectual qualities that contribute most significantly to the art of decision-making are: knowledge and intuition. Furthermore, a battle commander should possess the ability to operate in an uncertain environment, have a highly developed perceptual ability, and a thorough understanding of human nature. Recognizing that these attributes are limited in scope, they serve to focus attention on those traits considered essential to the decision-making process. The following will illustrate these traits as they apply to command.

a. Knowledge Base. Born into a military family, Ridgway followed his father's footsteps as a graduate of West Point. As an exceptionally bright student and an obsessive reader, Ridgway read every military biography and memoir he could.¹² He appeared to have an insatiable thirst for knowledge. While fulfilling his assignment as a Spanish instructor at the academy during World War I, Ridgway volunteered to be a tactics instructor during off-duty hours. By teaching tactics, Ridgway hoped to enhance his infantry skills to prevent their decay. This experience proved valuable allowing him the opportunity and meet with World War I officers and discuss their experiences in the war.¹³ Furthermore, he was an avid reader and student of World War I history. His comprehensive knowledge of this war—the mistakes and victories—influenced him throughout his career.

Ridgway's educational tours included the Company Officers Course (graduating second), Field Officers Course (graduating top of the class) and the Command and General Staff School. His scholarly bent proved essential in his leadership. His education allowed him to

¹² Blair, 560.

¹³ Matthew B. Ridgway and Harold H. Martin, Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 34.

analyze a problem and clearly communicate his thoughts and solutions. He developed a facility with words that enabled him to draft complicated war plans, analytical staff papers, and speeches with comparative ease.¹⁴ This well developed and important communication skill would allow Ridgway to succinctly articulate his understanding of the situation in Korea and clarify his intent and expectations. In a letter addressed to the Eighth Army, Ridgway clearly expressed his understanding of the situation in Korea and the importance of the Eighth Army's presence. This letter, read by every man, persuasively answered why they were there and what they were fighting for. Later, as Supreme Commander of U.N. Forces, Ridgway issued his letter of instruction to the service chiefs. Making every effort to be "unmistakably clear" and precise, he ensured subordinate commanders had a firm understanding of his intentions.¹⁵

Ridgway's strong knowledge base, acquired through formal schooling, independent study and personal reading, became intrinsic. It provided an intuitive capability allowing him to rapidly assess a situation and react appropriately. His use of intuition reveals the fundamental importance of this trait to battle command.

b. Intuition. The commander must deal with uncertainty, ascertain the pertinent facts and make quick decisions and implement them with resolute determination. Intuition permits the commander to complete his understanding of the battlefield and make appropriate decisions.

Ridgway relied on intuition to complete his understanding of the battlefield and to act promptly. However, he understood his intuitions could be wrong and invited critique as

¹⁴ Blair, 560.

¹⁵ Ridgway, The Korean War , 164.

appropriate. As a "reality check," he often met with subordinate commanders, to review plans in which they would be involved. Of this process Ridgway wrote, "I wanted in every instance to get for myself the feel of the situation as these officers responsible for execution of the plans might sense it. With this firsthand knowledge of their views added to all other relevant information, I would be in a position to make sound decisions - for which as Theater Commander I would accept full and sole responsibility."¹⁶

Intuition in the decision-making process allows the successful battle commander to fill information voids. However, to fully appreciate intuition as it applies to command, it is necessary to further explore other intellectual attributes.

c. Ability to operate in an uncertain environment. An effective commander's ability to operate in an uncertain environment requires an above-average tolerance for uncertainty. Commanders should accept that information will be missing, wrong, confusing, or misleading. The capability to determine a feasible plan with minimal or questionable information is essential to operating in this environment.¹⁷ Ridgway's adaptability and flexibility in dealing with uncertainty are a testimony to his ability to operate in this type of environment. Specifically, Ridgway's efforts to cope with the lack of reliable intelligence.

Recounting the horrible intelligence at the time of his arrival in Korea, Ridgway remarked, "All intelligence could show me was a big red goose egg out in front of us, with "174,000" scrawled in the middle of it."¹⁸ In effort to fill the gaps in intelligence, he immediately ordered

¹⁶ Ridgway, The Korean War, 162.

¹⁷ John F. Schmitt and Gary A. Klein, "Fighting in the Fog: Dealing with Battlefield Uncertainty," Marine Corps Gazette, August 1996, 68.

¹⁸ Ridgway, Soldier, 205.

vigorous patrolling to establish and maintain contact with the enemy. The patrolling revealed the enemy position and strength, permitting Ridgway to “obtain an accurate picture of its [North Korean/CCF forces] power and deployment.”¹⁹ Although the lack of reliable intelligence was of concern to Ridgway, he never allowed it to deter the U.N. offensive. For example, after an unsuccessful attempt to obtain information on the Chinese deployment in North Korea, Ridgway began “Operation Killer.” He blindly began the attack with little intelligence as to the possible reaction of the enemy forces and with the full understanding that he may be forced to cancel the attack.²⁰

d. Highly developed perceptual ability. Assessing the Eighth Army’s ability to begin the offensive was not something Ridgway thought could be done “secondhand.” It was something he had to judge for himself. His method relied upon meeting with the men on the front and taking in, through all his senses, the situation at hand.²¹

During his first days in command of the Eighth Army, Ridgway accurately grasped the problems confronting the army. In addition to the debilitating loss of morale and confidence, Ridgway recognize the inadequate deployment of forces along the front. Anticipating an imminent North Korean attack, he immediately committed most of his reserves to reinforce the front. This decision was critical to establishing a proper defensive posture against the threatening enemy. Though the Eighth Army eventually withdrew, the reinforcements assured an orderly and organized withdraw necessary to prevent a mass exodus to the Pusan perimeter.

¹⁹ Blair, 571.

²⁰ Mossman, 305.

²¹ Ridgway, The Korean War 85.

Ridgway's perception was of fundamental importance in formulating key decisions as the threat of a North Korean offensive drew near. Had he failed to recognize these deficiencies, it may have resulted in the commitment of troops with disastrous results.

e. Understanding of human nature. Ridgway had a keen appreciation of human nature and its profound effect on the warfighting capability. To restore the fighting spirit, Ridgway made great efforts to bolster the morale, confidence and trust of the Eighth Army.

First, Ridgway feared that the effect of withdrawing combined with the prevailing defeatist attitude would cause ROK forces to defect to the CCF. To strengthen ROK morale and proclaim his commitment, Ridgway immediately met with South Korean President Syngman Rhee to convey his intent upon staying and fighting. President Rhee subsequently addressed the ROK forces proclaiming the U.N. resolve. This address proved essential to strengthening ROK morale and resolve while mitigating the chance of defection.

Second, Ridgway demanded commanders develop the trust of their troops. As an example, Ridgway rescinded an order given by a Corps commander to "hold at all costs." The reason, he wrote, "...[was] to make clear to all of them that the leaders were concerned for their safety, [and] would not risk their lives needlessly nor abandon any units that were cut off."²² Further developing the troops trust, Ridgway insisted commanders be on the frontline. This was an important signal to the soldiers and showed that the commander was not reluctant to take the risks he would ask his soldiers to take.

The ability of Ridgway to so accurately understand the immediate situation within days of his arrival is a credit to his military genius. To so simply understand the complexities surrounding the fundamental problems confronting the Eighth Army and provide solutions is

²² Ridgway, The Korean War, 90.

indicative of his skills as battle commander. His successes, based in part upon the combined effect of these intellectual traits, lend credence to the applicability of Ridgway as a model battle commander. Yet to complete this analysis, it is necessary to look at the personality traits required of the battle commander.

2. Personality. Personality traits serve as an adjunct upon which the intellectual traits are developed. Though these traits presented here are not all inclusive, they serve to emphasize their importance to the character of the battle commander. The personality traits include: moral courage, determination and boldness.

a. Moral Courage. Ridgway was not afraid to stand behind his decisions. His guiding belief that the troops come first, above all, served the moral test to his decisions. His conviction in this belief manifested itself on several occasions in World War II as Ridgway voiced alarming concern over disastrous plans that he felt would result in the needless loss of American lives. Through his passionate appeals, these plans were discarded. Ridgway later wrote "...the hard decisions are not the ones you make in the heat of battle. Far harder to make are those involved in speaking your mind about some hare-brained scheme which proposes to commit troops to action under conditions where failure is almost certain, and the only results will be the needless sacrifice of priceless lives."²³ It was Ridgway's belief that such candor with superiors takes high moral courage. He considered this attribute much more important to the commander than physical courage which was never uncommon in battle.²⁴

b. Determination As one of Ridgway's tasks, he was determined to prevent evacuation of the peninsula. He met with Syngman Rhee to bolster ROK confidence. He developed

²³ Ibid., 83.

²⁴ Ridgway, The Korean war 189.

strongly fortified defensive lines. He restored Eighth Army morale. He ultimately developed an offensive force. These efforts illustrate his intense determination. In addition, Ridgway was determined to fight the enemy above all else. The need to maintain contact with the enemy and destroy his will to fight remained the cornerstone upon which Ridgway would punish the CCF. Developing an aggressive "attack-minded" force was not without its difficulties. He encountered resistance among his staff and subordinate commanders. An example of this resistance was the planned evacuation of the U.N. Forces to the Pusan perimeter during the Spring of 1951 which countered Ridgway's belief. As Army historian Bill Mossman points out, Ridgway was "astonished that his staff would recommend the voluntary and complete surrender of the initiative, Ridgway disapproved the recommendations immediately and informed his staff once again that they would think primarily in terms of the attack."²⁵

c. **Boldness.** Boldness in any decision implies the assumption of risk. The bolder the decision the greater the risk. Ridgway, though bold in nature, did not condone unbridled recklessness. This sentiment was often reflected in his urging of unit commanders to moderate their bold desire to destroy the enemy with preservation of friendly forces.²⁶ In describing Ridgway, author Joseph Cerami wrote, "His boldness was tempered by his superior intellect...."²⁷

²⁵ Mossman, 302.

²⁶ Ridgway, The Korean War, 119.

²⁷ Joseph R. Cerami, "Wrestling the Initiative: Ridgway as Operational Commander in the Korean War, December 1950 to April 1951," (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS: 1988), 25.

At the battle of Chipyong, Ridgway rejected his Corps Commander's request to withdraw from an encircled position. In a bold decision, he delivered a "hold at all costs" order. With clear recognition of the risk, he did not take this decision lightly. Ridgway "held the view that Chipyong was the vital "left shoulder" of the CCF penetrations and that it must be held."²⁸ Ridgway, holding true, sent reinforcements. In a vicious nip-and-tuck battle marked with feats of heroics, the U.N. troops triumphed. However, the success of the U.N. troops hung in peril for several tense days. In short, the successful outcome of this fierce battle symbolized the renewed spirit of the Eighth Army and proved his forces "quite capable of further offensive operations."²⁹

This paper has outlined the intellectual and personality traits of a battle commander as they apply to Ridgway. As commander of the Eighth Army and Commander in Chief of the United Nations Command, he performed remarkably under extremely difficult circumstances. He skillfully revitalized a demoralized coalition force, seized the initiative and began a highly successful offensive. Yet, how does his application of these attributes serve to illustrate the model battle commander? What affect will information superiority have on the desired characteristics of operational commanders? Will the attributes of future operational commanders be different from those outlined here and exemplified by Ridgway? An analysis of his example provides the answer. The following points will validate the requisite qualities and show their relevance to operational commanders of today and the future.

²⁸ Blair, 697.

²⁹ Mossman, 300.

Application to Future Battle Commanders

1. Decision-making. Information superiority suggests a greater amount of available information. Therefore, one may assume that decisions will be made more quickly. However, this information dominance may hinder more than help the decision-making process if the commander lacks some of the attributes of the battle commander. To refute the notion that decisions will be made more quickly an analogy will be used. First, one should equate pieces of information with the pieces of a puzzle. Second, one should assume the pieces are of one color and fit multiple other pieces. Thirdly, one should assume there is no firm notion of what the final picture will look like. Lastly, one should view the process of the building of the puzzle to the decision-making process.

Assuming information superiority will expedite the decision-making process is tantamount to adding more pieces to an already difficult puzzle. Additional pieces may only serve to delay the process of building a coherent picture.

Several attributes of the battle commander will be necessary to deal with the challenges of information superiority. First, one must have a highly developed perceptual ability. Ridgway's highly perceptive ability allowed him to so rapidly assess the status of the Eighth Army within days of his arrival and make necessary corrections to remedy the deteriorated situation. Second, one must display an ability to operate in an uncertain environment. Ridgway exhibited great fortitude in dealing with the lack of intelligence. His ability to work with limited information and conduct successful offensive operations is a credit to his battle command skills.

2. Intuition. Intuition is vital to the decision-making process. To regard intuition as a “seat of the pants” decision-making process is to ignore the most indispensable form of decision-making to the battle commander. It takes full advantage of the intellectual background and personality traits of experienced commanders, and can greatly enhance the speed in which decisions are made. The battle commander must quickly ascertain the situation and sift through information to find that which is applicable. To demand analytical and quantitative analysis may stifle initiative while placing a greater demand on the limited time the battle commander has to make the decision and complete the task. The intuitive process can reduce the time required to make a decision and thereby offer the advantage by allowing the commander to remain inside the enemy’s decision loop.

Ridgway adroitly utilized his intuition to clearly fill voids in the information throughout his tenure in command. His grass-roots approach and dependence on his “gut feeling” proved reliable and accurate. Had he wasted precious time analyzing the initial dire situation presented to him, the prevention of another Dunkirk may not have been possible.

3. Uncertainty. Uncertainty is an inevitable and permanent feature of war. Although information superiority will hopefully reduce uncertainty, it most certainly will not eliminate it. The uncertainty will always remain. As we strive for information dominance, one must recognize the pitfalls of collating and digesting the vast amounts of information in a timely and truthful manner. To wrongfully assume that more information equates to greater accuracy may inappropriately place greater emphasis on deriving the “correct” decision with no margin for error. This mentality will necessarily create a new breed of commanders desiring to postpone decisions in the face of uncertainty believing more information is forthcoming.

Similarly, today's increased emphasis on a "zero defect" policy fails to recognize the impact of uncertainty on the decision-making process.

As was true for Ridgway, battle commanders of the future must possess the ability to operate in an uncertain environment. Accepting uncertainty implies the acceptance of risk. The successes enjoyed by Ridgway were not without risk. Had Ridgway waited to execute "Operation Killer" until he was convinced of the enemies status and intent, he would have forsaken the initiative. His ability to operate in an uncertain environment proved essential in his obtaining and maintaining the initiative throughout the remainder of the war.

4. Command Presence. Battle commanders must be where the action is. This belief was fundamental to Ridgway's opinion of sound leadership. By locating himself closer to the crisis, Ridgway was able to observe the action, the leadership, and the enemy. By observing directly, he was able to see for himself the actual situation. This allowed an unfiltered flow of information directly to him without unnecessary delays. The applicability to future battle commanders becomes much more important as future technology will allow commanders to "run" the war from a remote command center thousands of miles away. Removing the commander from the action will deprive him of the ability to gain for himself the essential quality of the battlespace situation.

5. Knowledge. Commanders must be knowledgeable of military history. History provides an invaluable background in improving combat decision-making. As most history is "written in blood," it should be the cornerstone of professional military education for the potential battle commander.

Ridgway's study of World War I proved most valuable to his military career. His studies allowed him to gain the experience of others who had gone before him. Likewise, Future operational commanders will be well served to study the classical historical examples. These studies should augment or fill voids in personal experience.

6. Wargames. War game simulation will prepare future battle commanders to deal with uncertainties of war. Similar to the importance of history in the development of future battle commanders, war game simulations can provide realistic training scenarios. Games provide the necessary backdrop and hone the essential qualities of the battlefield commander. Gaming simulation offers the commanders experience in decision-making they may never attain prior to reaching the level of operational leadership. Building the vast background of knowledge will only enhance the capability of the commander in dealing with the fog of war in the future.

7. Battle Command is "art". General Ridgway expertly exemplifies the battle commander, displaying the vital influence of intellect and personality to the decision-making process. The proper mix of these intellectual and personality traits and their demonstration through battle command is indicative more of an art than science. As information dominance approaches, the reliance upon the human element will be at its zenith.

Summary

The information superiority suggested in Joint Vision 2010 will have a tremendous impact on the battle commander. As we achieve information dominance, the human element will become as important in the future as was in the past. To abandon those tried and true characteristic qualities of past historical battle commanders would be to relinquish the responsibility of battle commanders to data analysts. As is evidenced herein, few leaders exemplify battle command better than General Matthew B. Ridgway. He epitomized the attributes required of future battle commanders. His instinctive use of these qualities proved vital to his successful military career and serve to illustrate the model battle commander.

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